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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5871
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 9434
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 7059
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4728
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000013

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SUBJECT: BURMA: NATIONAL LEAGUE FOR DEMOCRACY EXPANDS
LEADERSHIP

REF: 09 RANGOON 806

Classified By: P/E Chief Jennifer Harhigh for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

1. (C) Burma's National League for Democracy (NLD) Central Executive Committee (CEC) decided January 11 to add nine new members to its ranks. The decision, which Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) OKed on January 7, will be announced formally the week of January 18. Current CEC members, including ailing NLD Chair Aung Shwe, will retain their titles. Several prominent NLD figures, including party spokesmen Nyan Win and Hanthar Myint, NLD cyclone relief committee chair Ohn Kyaing, and prominent female NLD MP-elect/former political prisoner Dr. May Win Myint, are among the new additions. The CEC has heard no response to date from the GOB about ASSK's request to meet with the full CEC. End summary.

CEC Adds Nine New Members, with ASSK's Approval

2. (C) NLD CEC member Khin Maung Swe told us January 12 that the CEC voted January 11 to "reinforce" the NLD's governing body by increasing its ranks from 11 to 20 CEC members. He added that ASSK, the NLD party leader, passed a message January 7 through her personal physician, Dr. Tin Myo Win (aka Douglas), that she approves the expansion plan. (Note: Dr. Douglas visited ASSK at her home January 7 for 2.5 hours for her regular "first Thursday of the month" medical checkup. He reports she is in good health.)

3. (C) According to Khin Maung Swe, the current CEC members selected the new members. He added that, in the current political environment, it is impossible for the CEC to secure approval from the party's grass roots membership for the leadership changes. He said all current CEC members will retain their positions and titles, including ailing Party Chair Aung Shwe, who will remain in that post "until his death."

CEC to "Inform" GOB of Changes

¶4. (C) The CEC will inform the Burma government of its decision to expand the CEC by presenting the new membership list to the Election Commission prior to January 18. Following notification to the GOB, the NLD will formally announce the CEC membership expansion. (Note: Burma's Election Commission, originally founded in 1988, maintains an office in Nay Pyi Taw. The current chair is former Lt. Colonel U Win Ko. Little is known about the commission's membership or activities.) Khin Maung Swe stressed that the NLD is not seeking GOB approval of the intra-party decision; rather the CEC is merely "informing" the government.

Familiar Names among New CEC Members

¶5. (C) Asking for our discretion before the public announcement, Khin Maung Swe told us ASSK personal attorney and party spokesman Nyan Win, party spokesman Hanthar Myint, Information Committee member and former political prisoner Dr. Than Nyein, NLD Nargis Relief Committee Chair and former political prisoner Ohn Kyaing, prominent NLD member Than Nyunt (the brother-in-law of former Burmese PM and Military Intelligence Chief Khin Nyunt.) and prominent NLD MP-elect and former political prisoner May Win Myint will be among the nine new members. Aside from ASSK, May Win Myint will be the only female member of the CEC.

ASSK's Unanswered Request to Meet with CEC

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¶6. (C) The NLD has heard nothing lately about ASSK's request to Than Shwe last November for a meeting with the full CEC, though the party interpreted allowing ASSK to pay her respects to elder Uncles (Reftel) as a positive sign, according to Khin Maung Swe. He noted the GOB is very cautious. (Note: Liaison Minister Aung Kyi used the same word "cautious" to describe the GOB approach during a recent meeting with the CDA in Nay Pyi Taw (NPT), while expressing some hope for progress in discussions with ASSK. We gave Khin Maung Swe a heads up about the NPT conversation.) When we inquired whether ASSK's request to meet with the CEC should now be interpreted to include the newest CEC members, Khin Maung Swe told us the NLD has no illusion that the GOB would approve such an expanded meeting. He seemed to indicate a practical approach.

Comment

¶7. (C) The move to expand the CEC comes as no surprise. ASSK informed A/S Campbell in November of her need to bring changes in her party. Then she used a December 16 meeting with ailing party elders to obtain a mandate to allow her to reorganize the NLD, including an expansion of the CEC. Although current members will retain their positions, several are in poor health and are not involved in day-to-day party business. The expansion will inject new, and noticeably younger, faces, people in their 50s and 60s, bringing the average CEC age down to somewhere in the 70s. We expect the move will lead to increased internal debate over the future of the party, including what approach it might take regarding the 2010 elections. Ultimately, however, the party will still look to ASSK for leadership and is likely to remain somewhat paralyzed so long as she remains inaccessible.

DINGER